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ASIAN WOMEN'S MARIOLOGY IN CHRISTOLOGICAL CONTEXT

*Joseph Cheah, O.S.M.**

In recent years there has been an astonishing amount of literature available on Asian Liberation Theology, but by comparison not much scholarly material on Asian Mariology. The best and perhaps the most provocative of this material reveals the impact of modern feminist scholarship on Asian Mariology. Much of this literature, however, as Walter Brennan observed, "remained isolated rather than integrated together into a 'Marian Theology' that could either stand on its own—in relation to Christology and ecclesiology—or be taken into those studies."¹ This lack of integration reflects the nascent stage of Asian Mariology, which is still in the process of developing a systematic approach to a Marian theology in light of the feminine within the Asian context.

The emerging Asian women's Mariology, which uses the methodology of liberation theology, begins not with theology but with anthropology as its starting point. It begins not by describing God or Mary but by focusing on the struggles of Asian women in their own *Sitz im Leben*. From the resulting self-understanding emerge portraits of Mary which are rooted in the Scriptures and defined by the lived experience of Asian women within their own cultural contexts.² Mary is

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¹Walter Brennan, "Recent Developments in Marian Theology," *New Theology Review* 8, 2 (May 1995): 50.

² "Summary Statement on Feminist Mariology," in *Feminist Theology from the Third World*, ed. Ursula King (New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 271.

portrayed as a woman of faith who actively and freely responds to God's invitation, a "self-defining woman" who announces the end of the patriarchal order, a liberated woman who embodies the good news in the proclamation of the *Magnificat*.³ These new symbols of Mary give hope to many Asian women who are striving to liberate themselves from the institutionalized patriarchy which is so pervasive in Asian societies.

What I find lacking in this anthropological Mariology, however, is a strong connection between Mariology and Christology. Good Mariology comes from good Christology, and not vice versa. In other words, a Mariology that flows from good Christology is a Mariology that speaks to a people who see themselves as those to whom Jesus came as the Suffering Servant of God, as those to whom Jesus proclaimed the good news of the liberation of the poor and the oppressed. It is a Mariology of the poor and the powerless. It is a Mariology that begins in a situation of widespread poverty and oppression of all sorts: economic, social and political.

The anthropological approach to Asian Mariology must have a strong connection to that of Christocentric Mariology, which relates Mary to Christ in a subordinate way that does not separate her from solidarity with the rest of humanity. This approach clearly places Mary within the Church and, indeed, regards her as the outstanding member of the communion of saints. In contrast, the Christotypical approach to Mariology (Mariology "from above") places Mary's relationship to Christ by way of analogy to the redemptive role of Christ. This leads to descriptions of Mary as co-redeemer, co-mediator, or to other "privilege-centered" titles which could unnecessarily "mislead other Christian brethren about the true doctrine of the Catholic Church."⁴ Christocentric approach to Mariology (Mariology "from below"), however, leads directly into ecclesiotypical characteristics, thus estab-

³Chung Hyun Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 1990), 74-80. (Hereafter cited as *Sun Again*.)

⁴Pope Paul VI, *Mariæ cultus*, 32.

lishing the connections between Mariology, Christology, ecclesiology and anthropology.⁵

The Incarnation: The Context of Mariology

In his book, *Mary, Mother of the Lord*, Karl Rahner argues that the theology of human persons, and consequently the theology of Mary, must be seen in the context of the Incarnation:

It is impossible now, here in Christendom, *post Christum natum*, now that Christ is born, to say anything true, genuine and concrete about God, unless one acknowledges him as Emmanuel, God with us, the God of our flesh, of our human nature, the God of our sacramental signs, the God of our altars, the God who was born of the Virgin Mary and consequently God and man in one person, a human being among us.⁶

What this means is that the Incarnation must be the primary context for a good Mariology. The Incarnation insists that there is no one more human than Jesus. Because of the Incarnation it is no longer sufficient for Christians to talk about the *sui generis* nature of God without talking about the concrete, created human reality of Jesus. We can no longer say something genuine about God without saying something concrete about the humanity of Jesus, about theology without saying something about anthropology.

Mariology is possible because God willed from the beginning to bring about the divine redemption through human beings. It is totally a gift from God. Of the myriad ways in which God could have arranged the plan of redemption, God chose a less expected way, one that culminated in the partnership of God with Mary, and consequently the partnership of God with us. This means that we too have a place in theology, not in the margins of the Creed, as it were, but in the history of the redemptive work of God. It is in this context that Mariology is possible.⁷ Mariology is possible because of Christology. Anything we say about Mary must be seen in the context of

⁵Xavier Harris, "Mary in the Contemporary Church," unpublished paper, 7. In this unpublished work, X. Harris highlights the nine characteristics of contemporary Mariology formulated by Frederick M. Jelly.

⁶Karl Rahner, *Mary, Mother of the Lord* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963), 25.

⁷K. Rahner, *Mary*, 22-29.

the Incarnation. When we talk about Mary, the first question is not "Who is Mary?" but rather, "Who is Jesus?"

The question Jesus posed, "Who do people say that I am?" (Mk. 8:29), is deeply theological as well as profoundly anthropological. Before we can respond to the question "Who do people say that Jesus is?" we must first respond to the question "Who do people say that I am?" (or "Who do people say that we are?"). On the surface we are what we do: "I am a teacher, engineer, priest, waiter, etcetera." As we peel away this outermost layer we see ourselves in terms of our religious or corporate identity: "I am a Christian, Catholic, Servite, etcetera." At the next layer down we perceive ourselves in terms of our ethnic, racial and national identity: "I am an Asian; I am an American; I am an Asian-American; etcetera." At the layer below that we describe ourselves in terms of our gender: "I am a man" or "I am a woman." At the innermost layer is our humanity. At this innermost layer, we are all the same regardless of our gender, social and cultural identity. We all experience love, joy, ecstasy—as well as alienation, pain and suffering. At this level we are very much aware that what is most important about us is not that we have a title or a certain status, but that we are human. Once we acknowledge that fact, then we can appreciate the uniqueness of our other identities. In other words, the social dimension in our life—that is, the association of ourselves with gender, ethnic, religious and other cultural groupings—proceeds from our identity as a human person. The most important component of our sense of identity is our humanity itself. It is only when we are able to define ourselves on a human level that we can come to appreciate what it means to be a man or a woman, an Asian or an American, a Buddhist or a Christian, cleric or lay, and so on. The primacy of the anthropological element over that of gender, race, religious or other corporate identity is the basic characteristic of liberation theology.⁸ This point was stressed at the sixth conference of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theolo-

⁸Leonardo Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator: A Critical Christology for Our Time* (New York: Orbis Books, 1978), 44. The primacy of the anthropological element over the

gians (EATWOT) in Geneva, Switzerland, and reiterated at the Singapore Conference:

If feminist theology is concerned only with sexism, and not with the liberation of the whole human race, it too is oppressive. We see feminist Mariology as a liberation theology that gives hope of humanization to all the world.⁹

Christology, not Mariology, is where we must turn in order to discover what it means to be human. In his humanity, Jesus shows us what it means to be truly human. To be human is to be relational: to love God, to love our neighbor as ourselves, to care for the sick and the disconsolate, to be in solidarity with the oppressed and the marginalized, and to love even our enemies.¹⁰ Jesus shows us in a concrete way what this means: not by lording it over others but by serving others (Mt. 20:25-26); by hearing the word of God and doing it (Lk. 8:19-21); by giving the necessity of reconciliation a priority over the obligation of worship (Mt. 5:23-24); by losing one's life to find it. It is in relating to others—especially the poor, the sick, the powerless and the marginalized of society—that Jesus shows us who he is: liberator, reconciler, healer, fully human and fully divine.

Mary is a liberator insofar as she reflects Jesus the liberator. Mary is a reconciler insofar as she reflects Jesus the reconciler. Mary is a human being fully alive insofar as she reflects Jesus, the perfect exemplar of our humanity. In other words, Mariology comes from Christology, because Mary leads us not to herself but to Christ. Good Christology, in turn, provides us with an anthropology that is free from male-centrism and other anthropological vices.

ecclesiastical is one of five characteristics of Latin American Christology mentioned by L. Boff.

⁹"Summary," in *Feminist Theology*, 271.

¹⁰Virginia Fabella, "Christology from an Asian Women's Perspective," in *We Dare to Dream: Doing Theology as Asian Women*, ed. V. Fabella and Sun Ai Lee Park (New York: Orbis Books, 1989), 4-6. (Hereafter cited as *Dare to Dream*.)

Asian Anthropology

Any attempt to comprehend a revitalized Mariology from the perspective of Asian liberation theology must begin not by theologizing about Mary but by trying to understand the plight of the suffering millions, the majority of Asia's population, in their own *Sitz im Leben*. The life situation of Asia's poor is beautifully and poignantly captured by Samuel Rayan, a Jesuit from India, in his opening address at the third meeting of the Asian Theological Conference (ATC III).

Let us be silent for a moment
Silent before the awesome reality of Asia . . .
Before Asia's vastness, variety, and complexity . . .
Asia's peoples, languages, and cultures . . .
Asia's poor, their cries, tears, and wounds . . .
the death of her babies by the millions and
the humiliation of women . . . and men . . . and their struggles.
Let us take Asia to our heart; and
See her and feel her within us.
Embrace her in her wholeness and her brokenness
And let her rivers and her tears flow through us, and
Her winds and her sighs blow within us. . . .¹¹

Rayan talks about the immensity of Asia in terms of the vastness of its geography and population, the richness of its history, the plurality of its religious heritage, and the diversity of its cultures, languages and traditions. He also mentions the immensity of Asia's poverty. While the ingenuity of the Asian people has transformed such nations as Japan, Taiwan, South Korea and Singapore into economic powerhouses capable of competing with the West, Asia as a whole is extremely poor. The majority of its people are destitute, uneducated, marginalized and powerless. Asian liberation Mariology develops in response to the needs of these people living under such oppressive conditions. It is a Mariology of the poor, the oppressed and the powerless, of whom women are in the majority.

Asian women are doubly oppressed because most Asian societies are male-oriented and male-dominated. Militarism, neo-

¹¹Samuel Rayan, "The Search for an Asian Spirituality of Liberation," in *Asian Christian Spirituality*, ed. Virginia Fabella, et. al. (New York: Orbis Books, 1992), 11.

colonialism, capitalism and consumerism have all contributed to the maintenance of traditional patriarchal culture at the expense of Asian women, who struggle against not only dehumanizing economic and political conditions but also demeaning and subjugating elements of the traditional cultural realities. Sexism, for example, is prevalent and is often sanctioned by religion. Educational and employment opportunities for women are limited.¹² In both the church and the society at large, "women are excluded from decision-making bodies, even when the matters they are considering affect women's lives directly."¹³ What we today call "sexism" and "patriarchalism" have deep roots in the Confucianism of East Asian cultures.

The Influence of Confucianism

Lin Yu Tan once said every Chinese person is a Confucianist and a Taoist.¹⁴ In his public life there is a proper way of relating to people, but in his private life he may be more attentive to the carefree side of life: sipping tea, doing *tai chi*, or even "striking a few lines of poem."¹⁵ Confucianism is basically a sapiential tradition. It teaches us geniality, erudition and enlightened humanism. It values family solidarity, a strong work ethic, and love of learning.¹⁶ Within Confucianism the patriarchal family is considered the basic unit of Chinese society. Confucius believed that human potential is achieved within the family.¹⁷ It was in this context that Confucius formulated social and ethical principles by which individuals could be guided toward mature relationships and ethical interaction with each other.

Originally these guiding principles were neither legalistic nor hierarchical. Later they were codified by the community into demanding rules and rituals.¹⁸ This is seen in the practice

¹² "Conference Statement: Consultation on Asian Women's Theology," in *Dare to Dream*, 151-152.

¹³ "Conference Statement," in *Dare to Dream*, 152.

¹⁴ Speaker unknown, "Earl Lecture," Berkeley, CA, 1990.

¹⁵ Speaker unknown, "Earl Lecture," Berkeley, CA, 1990.

¹⁶ Thomas and Dorothy Hoobler, *Confucianism: World Religions* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 1993), 8-16.

¹⁷ Hoobler, *Confucianism*, 10.

¹⁸ Dave Ng, "A Journey to a Path: Cultural Tradition in Dialogue with Teaching," unpublished paper, November 1994, 2. Ng employs the hermeneutics of demythologizing to uncover the original principle of Confucianism. He asserts that "Confucianism

of filial piety—that is, the son's obligation to offer sacrifices to his deceased father's spirit—and in the roles and patterns of behavior expected of the individual family members. With regard to filial piety, Dave Ng provides this insightful description:

What began as gratitude for one's ancestors—in the practice of filial piety—got taught in later years as respect, then veneration, then as worship. And the worship got codified and ritualized into precise prescriptions. . . . Examples became codified and the community came to expect—eventually to demand—precise practice of the rules.¹⁹

Confucius emphasized the duties and obligations of the individual members of the family. In time the behavioral patterns among family members, their duties and obligations, were stereotyped and closely defined for each person according to his or her role in the family. This is eloquently described by Derald Wing Sue.

The father's behavior in relationship to other family members is generally dignified, authoritative, remote and aloof. Sons are generally highly valued over daughters. The primary allegiance of the son is to the family, and obligations as a good father or husband are secondary. Asian women are expected to carry on the domestic duties, to marry, to become obedient helpers of their mothers-in-law, and to bear children, especially males.²⁰

The different ways in which boys and girls were treated began at birth. During their formative years boys were taught how to read and write, whereas girls were involved almost exclusively in performing household chores. Young girls learned by responding submissively to their elders. This prepared them for their subservient role in life. At marriage a girl had no say in the choice of her husband. After marriage she usually

in principle is not the legalistic hierarchial system that is popularly understood today" (p. 3). Such an assertion is also maintained by Tu Wei-Ming in his writings. Cf. Tu Wei-Ming, *Centrality and Commonality: An Essay on Confucian Religiousness*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).

¹⁹D. Ng, "Journey," 2.

²⁰Derald Wing Sue, "Ethnic Identity: The Impact of Two Cultures on the Psychological Development of Asians in America," in *Counseling Asian Minorities: A Cross-Cultural Perspective*, ed., D. R. Atkinson, et al. (Iowa: Wm. C. Brown Co., 1979), 84.

lived with her parents-in-law, and she had to serve them with humility and respect. This meant catering to the demands of all the family members and attending to the menial household chores. Marriage rendered her, in effect, a mere possession of her husband and his family.²¹ Today such obsequious behavior would be characteristic of a "sexist" society, but in traditional Chinese culture it was considered virtuous. Christine Tse captures this in her reflection.

Women in China or in countries whose cultures and traditions are influenced by Confucian thought are used to considering themselves virtuous if they accept everything with passivity and quiet resignation. A woman is subservient to her father before she is married, to her husband after marriage, and to her oldest son when she becomes a widow. Education is either denied to girls or given first to boys in the family.²²

Vestiges of such "virtuous" behaviors can be found in varying degrees in all East Asian cultures influenced by Confucianism. For example, when children act "unvirtuously"—that is, when they do not accept the wishes of their parents with "passivity and quiet resignation"—they are reminded that their aberrant behavior is a source of great shame to their family. Often the inculcation of shame and guilt are used to control the behavior of individual family members.²³ In former times such values and life-styles produced a stable society in which everyone knew his or her proper place. Today, however, they are viewed as oppressive and dehumanizing to many young Asians, especially to educated Asian women.²⁴

Asian Women's Mariology

Of the many factors which give rise to the development of feminist consciousness among Asian Christian women, the availability of theological education to a few Asian women is of great significance. Theological training of these women is the initial catalyst which enables Asian women theologians

²¹Hoobler, *Confucianism*, 96-97.

²²Christine Tse, "New Ways of Being Church: A Catholic Perspective," in *Dare to Dream*, 37-38.

²³D. W. Sue, "Ethnic Identity," in *Counseling Asian Minorities*, 84.

²⁴Hoobler, *Confucianism*, 96-97.

to critique and deconstruct existing theologies from within.²⁵ Such a critique—focusing on all forms of oppression resulting from institutionalized patriarchy and a reinterpretation of the Christian tradition in the light of Asian women's experience—has led to the emergence of an Asian Women's Mariology.²⁶ A summary of some of the new approaches to Asian Women's Mariology is found in an ecumenical paper on Mariology formulated by Asian Christian women at a conference in Singapore in 1987. It reflects the twofold task of Asian feminism:

1. We must name, and liberate ourselves from, the destructive effects of 2,000 years of male interpretation of Mary.
2. We must return to the Scriptures as women within our own cultural contexts, to rediscover the Mary who is liberated and liberator.²⁷

The first task is not a rallying cry to end all male interpretations of Mary. Rather it is a reminder that there is no such thing as an objective theology, for every theology brings with it certain presuppositions through which it interprets the community's faith and the greater world in which the community exists. Because the theology of Mary has been almost the exclusive domain of men for nearly 2000 years, men and women need to be liberated from certain androcentric presuppositions that keep women in a subordinate position.²⁸

The second task focuses on the reconstruction of the Scriptural images of Mary in light of the experiences of Asian women within their own cultural contexts. In Mariology this means the need to be liberated from the understanding of Mary primarily as a model of submissiveness, unearthly virginity and other

²⁵*Feminist Theology*, ed. Ursula King, 5.

²⁶Although the term, "Asian Feminist Mariology" is used by some Asian female theologians, many prefer to call their work "Asian women's theology, instead of feminist theology, because the term 'feminist' carries connotations of a militant, man-hating, and separatist stance of some women in the West. The term 'feminism' is translated as 'women's rights movement' in the Chinese language, which carries a significant political overtone not found in other terms" (Kwok Pui-Lan, "The Future of Feminist Theology: An Asian Perspective," in *Feminist Theology*, ed. Ursula King, 65).

²⁷"Summary," in *Feminist Theology*, 271.

²⁸"Summary," in *Feminist Theology*, 271.

supra-human traits, in order to "rediscover the Mary who is liberated and liberator."²⁹ Here the words of Virginia Fabella about Christology (from her perspective as an Asian woman) are noteworthy, since her thought is applicable to Asian women's Mariology as well: "What we say may not be anything new; what is important is now we are saying it ourselves. We are giving answers that reflect not only what we encounter in Scriptures, but also our reality and experience as Asian women."³⁰ It is in this process of rediscovering the "liberated and liberator" image of Mary within the context of Asian women's experience of suffering and hope that we find what is distinctively the contribution of Asian women to Mariology.

Acutely aware of their cumulative experience of pain and suffering under historically conditioned and culturally sanctioned androcentric social oppression, Asian Christian women are looking towards Mary as a model of the fully liberated human being. While they acknowledge Jesus as the model *par excellence* of full humanity for both women and men, Asian Christian women have an affinity for Mary as a model of full humanity precisely because she is a woman. Many Asian Christian women, as they reclaim their dignity as human beings, look toward Mary as their model of the fully liberated woman.³¹ The journey towards full humanity, however, has been difficult for women who for too long have known only the model of a domesticated Mary on the one hand and an exalted Mary on the other. Through the years, these two images of Mary used by the Church have reinforced women's oppression.³² The unmasking of these androcentric distortions is an essential ingredient in achieving full humanity for women.

The Domestication of Mary

Many of these distortions can be found in the Annunciation account, where Mary has often been portrayed in traditional

²⁹"Summary," in *Feminist Theology*, 271.

³⁰V. Fabella, "Christology," in *Dare to Dream*, 3.

³¹Chung, *Sun Again*, 75.

³²"Summary," in *Feminist Theology*, 271.

Mariology as a model of submissiveness, of passive receptiveness, of the kind of motherhood that imposes a strict limit on female aspirations outside the home. Such a distortion has been seen by many Asian Christian women as a "symbol of a woman who is domesticated by men."³³ But the rereading of Mary's affirmative response to the divine invitation—that is, her *fiat*—reveals her profound faith in God and in herself. Such a faith response requires more than just an intellectual assent; it is primarily a response which comes from the depths of a person's heart. Varying translations of Luke 1:29 tell us that the Lucan Mary was "deeply disturbed" (NJ)/"startled" (RSV)/"perplexed" (New RSV) by the unexpected intervention of God's angelic agent in her life. She began to wonder what implications the angelic greeting might have for her future, especially the effect it would have on her relationship with Joseph. She was also reflective in her decision-making process: "How can this be since I am a virgin?" (Lk. 1:34). Such determined deliberation on Mary's part belies the portrait of Mary as an acquiescent Jewish girl who passively submitted to the angelic request. On the contrary, Mary was an active participant in her encounter with the heavenly herald. She was honest about her feelings, open to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, straightforward in her response, and very much aware of the risk involved in her decision.³⁴ It was only after she had managed to assess the conflicting feelings within her and had allowed the reality of the encounter with Gabriel to take hold of her that was she able to give an obedient response: "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word" (Lk. 1:38).

This image of Mary is anything but an image of a domesticated woman. Rather, Mary models for us how the disciple of God responds to the Lord's call. The Lucan portrayal of Mary's *fiat*, according to Raymond Brown, draws on Jesus' positive response to the presence of his physical family (Lk. 8:19-21), "transposing to the first person the affirmation that Jesus'

³³Chung, *Sun Again*, 75.

³⁴Chung, *Sun Again*, 75-78.

mother heard the word of God and did it.”³⁵ In other words, Luke has shown that Mary's reaction to the prospect of becoming the Messiah's biological mother is in complete agreement with the way she acted all her life: Mary is the one who hears the word of God and lives it. Asian women theologians go a step further, by adding that the criterion of discipleship in the Lucan account of Jesus' family (“My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and act on it” [Lk. 8:21]) is more than an overture to the evangelist's characterization of Mary as the model disciple. They see Jesus himself “acknowledging that it was from his mother, and “his family, that he himself learned to hear and obey the word of God.”³⁶

The Exaltation of Mary

Traditional male-defined Mariology presents Mary not only as a personification of submissiveness and pietism but also of unearthly virginity and other exalted attributes which are far removed from the everyday experiences of women. By exalting Mary as the virgin beyond sexuality, this type of male-defined Mariology removes the element of fear that female sexuality represents to men. Consequently, Mary is ultimately stripped of much in her nature that makes her human. Such a myopic understanding of virginity is epitomized in the portrayal of Mary as both virgin and mother—theologically but not biologically possible.³⁷ For many Asian Christian women the result is a symbol of Mary “with whom no ordinary woman could identify.”³⁸ It is a symbol of a woman who is domesticated by men.

Even though aware of the debates among biblical exegetes concerning the Church's formulation of Mary's virginity as “before birth” (*ante partum*), “at birth” (*in partu*) and “after birth” (*post partum*), many Asian feminists assert that the virginity of Mary is a relational reality rather than a biological

³⁵Raymond Brown, *Biblical Reflections on Crises Facing the Church* (New York: Paulist Press, 1975), 93.

³⁶“Summary,” in *Feminist Theology*, 273.

³⁷Chung, *Sun Again*, 75.

³⁸Chung, *Sun Again*, 75.

one.³⁹ Mary's virginity is the symbol of a new humanity, "the symbol for the autonomy of women, a liberated human being, who—not being subject to any other human being—is free to serve God."⁴⁰ As Chung Hyun Kyung puts it, "When a woman defines herself according to her own understanding of who she really is and what she is meant for in this universe (not according to the rules and norms of patriarchy), she is a virgin."⁴¹ Her identity is derived not in relation to men as in the Confucian culture, but in relation to herself, to the world and to God. Mary's virginity is, then, the symbol of a self-defining woman, a person who has been liberated from the bondage of patriarchal stereotypes.

Mary's virginity in the Lucan Infancy Narrative is a Christological endorsement as well as Mariological affirmation. The emphasis is on the extraordinary human conception of Jesus, who embodies the Kingdom of God and who, therefore, is destined to play a major role in salvation history. Mary is the instrument by which God accomplished, without any male intervention, Jesus' extraordinary human beginning. Joseph Fitzmyer maintains that Mary's virginal conception of Jesus is not simply a matter of overcoming sterility, as in the case of Elizabeth, but "rather a conception that is without the experience of male intercourse (*apeiros andron*)."⁴² For Asian Christian women the exclusion of the human male in the extraordinary human beginning of Jesus is "an active symbol of resistance against patriarchal order."⁴³ Indeed, it announces the "beginning of a new order, in which patriarchy can no longer be the basis of human life."⁴⁴

Mary of the Magnificat

This new social order is one of the central themes announced by Mary in her *Magnificat*. In the *Magnificat*, Mary is presented

³⁹Chung, *Sun Again*, 77.

⁴⁰Marianne Katoppo, *Compassionate and Free: An Asian Woman's Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 1980), 21.

⁴¹Chung, *Sun Again*, 77-78.

⁴²Joseph Fitzmyer, *Luke the Theologian: Aspects of His Teaching* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 67.

⁴³Chung, *Sun Again*, 77-78.

⁴⁴"Summary," in *Feminist Theology*, 274.

as the woman of faith, the model disciple of Christ, the first person to proclaim the message of God's Kingdom by anticipation. While most scholars contend that the words of the *Magnificat* cannot be attributed to Mary herself, she is clearly associated in that moving "Declaration of Independence" with, among others, its themes of joy, care for the poor and the powerless, and the reversal of people's status in life.⁴⁵ Mary's *Magnificat* reveals the revolutionary character of the Kingdom, where the proud (those who rely on their own power and express no need for God) are scattered and the *anawim* (those who admit their condition of powerlessness and are able to put their trust in God—that is, the opposite of the proud) are shown God's strength (Lk. 1:50–51); where the mighty are put down and the lowly are exalted (Lk. 1:52); where the hungry have their fill and the rich are sent away empty (Lk. 1:53). The *Magnificat* is a prophetic proclamation of a radical reversal of roles between the rich and the poor, the oppressor and the oppressed, the powerful and the weak—all signs of the advent of the Kingdom of God.⁴⁶ Mary, on whose lips the *Magnificat* is proclaimed, certainly could not be the docile, passive woman portrayed in traditional male-defined Mariology. Rather, she is an outspoken advocate for the poor and the powerless, a person dedicated to the Lord's work of liberating the poor and the oppressed from their condition of bondage.

Mary, a woman of the poor, is a representative of the piety of the *anawim*.⁴⁷ She not only praises God (Lk. 1:46–47) and identifies with the marginalized, the poor and the oppressed (Lk. 1:50–53), but is also herself of humble origin. She is from

⁴⁵Raymond Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* (New York: Image Books, 1977), 350–353. R. E. Brown, D. R. Jones, Benoit, Gniller, Shurmann, and other scholars contend that Luke appropriates the hypothetical pre-Lucan, Jewish Christian canticles—the *Magnificat* (1:46–55), the *Benedictus* (1:67–79), the *Gloria in Excelsis* (2:13–14), and the *Nunc Dimittis* (2:28–32)—from a collection of hymns composed by Jewish Christian *anawim* for the purpose of celebrating their salvation accomplished in Jesus.

⁴⁶Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1971), 96, 101–102, 107–108, 121. For Jeremias, the central theme of Jesus' proclamation, in both words and deeds, is the sudden advent of the Kingdom of God.

⁴⁷R. Brown, et al., eds. *Mary in the New Testament* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 142.

an impoverished town of Galilee called Nazareth (Lk. 1:27); she gives birth to her son in a stable (Lk. 2:7); she offers birds instead of a lamb in the sacrificial act required for the birth of a son (Lk. 2:24); she is found at a wedding with a group of people who cannot even afford sufficient wine for their guests (Jn. 2:3). Asian women, many of whom live in poverty, can easily identify with Mary, a woman of the poor. They challenge any attempt to make Mary into something more "respectable" and less of an embarrassment, such as depicting her in elaborate dress and bedecked with jewels. They reject "Mary's hijacking by a wealthy Church—for the consolation of the rich."⁴⁸

Despite her humble origins, the Lucan Mary is depicted as the *kecharitomene*, "the favored one" (Lk. 1:28)—God's handmaid for whose low estate God has high regard (Lk. 1:48) and through whom God effects the Incarnation. She commends herself to "all generations" (Lk. 1:48), not because of her own merit or accomplishment, but because God "who is mighty has done great things" for her (Lk. 1:49). Indeed, if God "who is mighty has done great things" for her, then the rulers had best tremble on their thrones, for the lowly are surely being lifted up. Mary, a woman of the poor, embodies the Good News that "God chose the foolish of the world to shame the wise, and God chose the weak of the world to shame the strong, and God chose the lowly and despised of the world, those who count for nothing, to reduce to nothing those who are something" (1 Cor. 1:27-28).

Through her *Magnificat*, Mary announces the kind of Messiah her son will be.⁴⁹ As the mother of Jesus she had a formative influence in her son's emotional and spiritual development. The radical change Mary announces in the *Magnificat* is proclaimed once again by her son, who began his mission by presenting himself as the person sent by God to proclaim the good news to the poor, "liberty to captives and recovery

⁴⁸ "Summary," in *Feminist Theology*, 274.

⁴⁹ "Summary," in *Feminist Theology*, 272. According to Asian women theologians, "it is Mary who will describe Jesus, not Jesus, or a male Church, who will describe Mary."

of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord" (Lk. 4:18-19,21). Clearly, there is nothing domesticated or pietistic about this Mary. She is the woman who embodies the Gospel in her proclamation of the *Magnificat*.

Conclusion

I began my treatment of Asian Mariology with Christology. By providing a Christological context for Asian Women's Mariology, I am, in effect, emphasizing that good Mariology needs more than an anthropological context; it must come from a good Christology—one which provides us with, among other things, a model for humanity in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. In his humanity, Jesus shows us what it means to be truly human. He shows us how to live life to the fullest. Understanding ourselves must begin at this most basic human level—what it means for us to be truly human—before we grapple with other identity issues. In other words, this anthropological element must have primacy over gender, race, religious affiliation or other ways of identifying ourselves.⁵⁰ In short, good Mariology comes from good Christology, which provides us with a human-centered anthropology rooted in reality.

The starting point of Mariology is Christology because Mary leads us to Christ and not to herself. Asian Women's Mariology contends that Mary, who leads us to Christ, must be free of the androcentric distortions that have characterized much of traditional Mariology. The emerging Mary must be neither domesticated nor etherealized. She is neither a domesticated woman—one who has been presented as a model of submissiveness, of passive receptiveness, of the kind of motherhood that imposes a strict limit on female aspirations outside the home—nor is she an exalted woman, one who has been portrayed as a model of unearthly virginity and a paradigm of perfections that are far removed from the everyday experiences of other women. Mary is a faith-filled woman who actively and freely responded to God's call, a "self-defining woman" who proclaims the end of the patriarchal order, a disciple of God

⁵⁰L. Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, 44.

who hears the word of God and does it, a fully liberated human being who embodies the liberating message of the *Magnificat*. She is an earthly Mary, a representative of the piety of the *anawim*, one who calls us to live out the Good News by feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, welcoming strangers, clothing the naked, caring for the ill and visiting the imprisoned (Mt. 25:35-36). This portraiture of Mary evokes someone "who is liberated and liberator." It offers hope to millions of Asian women who are struggling to liberate themselves from poverty, racism, classism, the caste system, militarism and all forms of oppression which "are the outcome of institutionalized patriarchy."⁵¹

⁵¹"Conference Statement," in *Dare to Dream*, 151.